BRAZILIAN LUDIC INTERFACES
Using game mechanics and entertainment for serious purposes

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

In this presentation we seek to analyze the use of game mechanics and entertainment for serious purposes. We discuss (with some brazilian cases studies) the impact of a ludic interface in the mediatic scene and how important it can be for the contemporary world. In this context, we use the idea of Johan Huizinga, author of the book Homo Ludens, in which he explains that in the human nature there is a tendency to play games or other ludic activities.

LUDIC INTERFACES, ENTERTAINMENT & GAME MECHANICS

First of all it's important to define the idea of ludic interfaces. According to European Masters in Ludic Interfaces Institute[1] ludic interfaces are playful interfaces. The notion of a "homo ludens", introduced by Johan Huizinga, is the conceptual backbone of the tools we are looking at. Think of devices like the Wii console, solar power operated building façades, unconventional musical instrument controllers, game art devices.

The tools and concepts applied with the concept of ludic interfaces differ from traditional technological systems as they are playful, user-generated and user-driven,

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[1] This content can be accessed in the URL http://creativegames.org.uk/LUDICI/masters/what-is

flexible, low-cost and cooperative. Ludic interfaces take the best from computer games, artistic experiment, interactive media, media conversion, social networks and modding cultures and result in tools that offer an ease of use and playfulness to cope with a rapidly changing society.

Within this ludic interfaces context it is important to highlight the ideas of Johan Huizinga (1872 – 1945). Huizinga was a Dutch historian and one of the founders of modern cultural history. In his book "Homo Ludens" (1938) he discusses the possibility that playing is the primary formative element in human culture.

In this book, the author presents the idea of the "magic circle". As described by Adams and Rollings (2009, page 8), Huizinga did not use the term as a generic name for the concept: his text refers to the actual playground, or a physical space for playing.

Inside the magic circle, real-world events have special meanings, as in the example below (ADAMS & ROLLINGS, 2009, page 8):
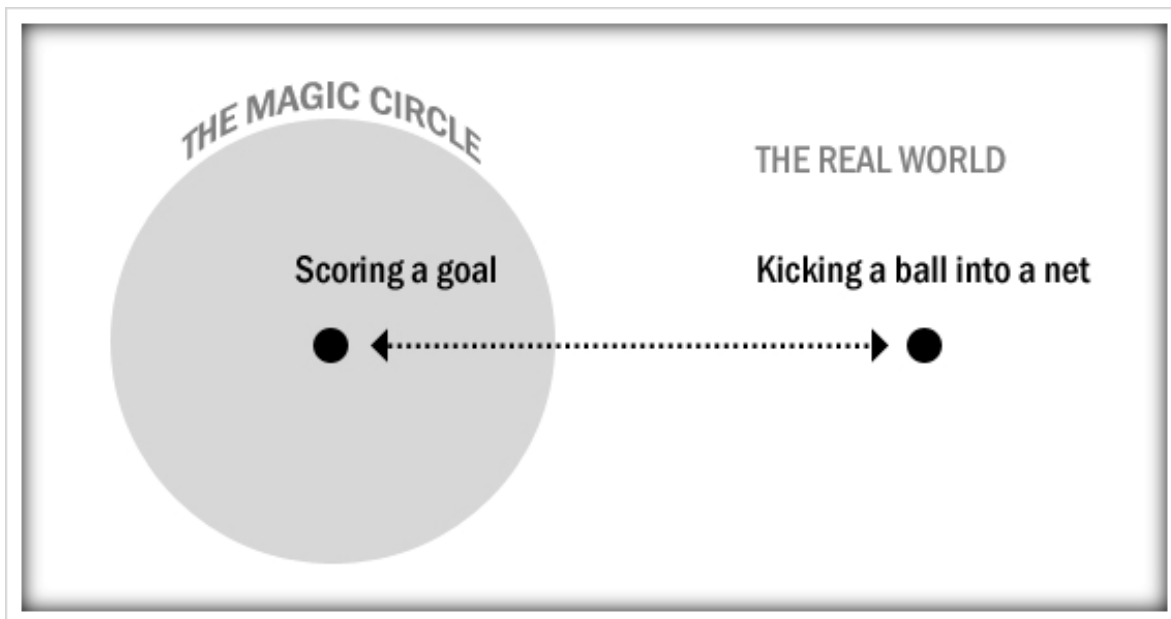
The magic circle is a place of dreams and fantasy. It's an escape for everyday problems and chores. And the most important: everything inside the magic circle is, in some way, transformative. Each time a person leaves the magic circle they bring meaning and experience.

Huizinga (1955, page 10) wrote that all play moves and have their existance within a playground marked off beforehand, either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the playground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc, are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. They are all temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.

In the image below there's a try create a visual representation of the idea of the magic circle:
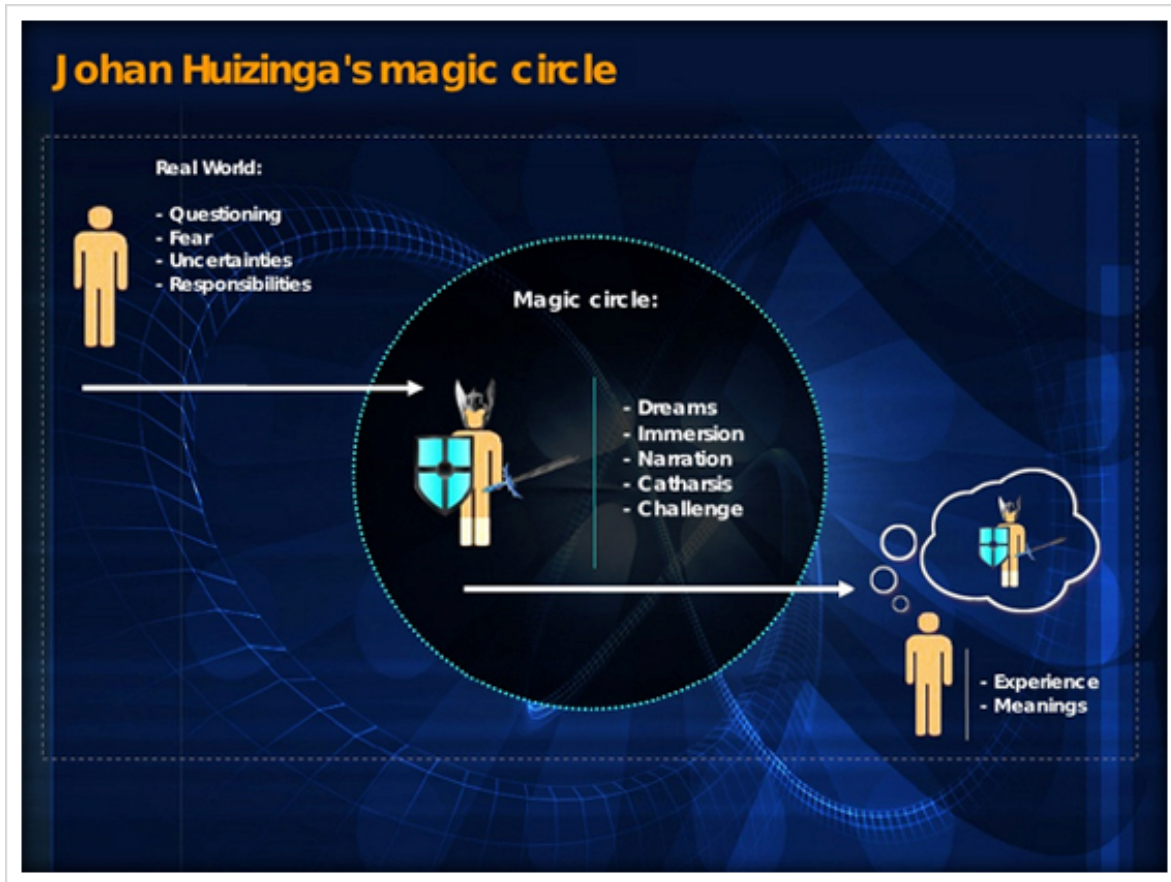
So let's see two Brazilian case studies with these ideas in their conceptions. In both examples we can see the use of ludic concepts, entertainment and game mechanics.

Case study 1: My Red and Black Blood

This case study is about a recent Brazilian advertising campaign (2012) for blood donation named "Meu Sangue Rubro Negro" (My Red and Black Blood) created by Leo Burnett advertising agency (credits to Rodrigo Jatene, creative director of this campaign).

Basically, the idea was to use a football team (the Brazilian team "Vitória") as a platform to encourage people to donate blood. For this, the team uniform was changed.

The red colour of the t-shirt was replaced with white, and only with blood donations the color will (gradually) change. The image below shows this process.

The URL below explains the campaign (subtitles in english) http://goo.gl/29cFS .

We can see the ludic element used in a social cause in this case. The idea of bringing the color back to the t-shirt based on the number of liters of donated blood is a fun way to mobilize people to get involved in a real social problem.

Maybe it's correct to say that with ludic interfaces even serious messages may become entertainment.

Case study 2: Climate Game

This case study is about Climate Game a game that I developed for a brazilian company named Games For Business (english site in the URL http://www.games4b.com). Games For Business works in the area of serious games, that, following the thoughts of Nick Iuppa and Terry Borst, may be explained as a game with a professional, educational or pedagogical use. It's a kind of game that mixes storytelling with mechanics that mean to send a serious message to the players involved in the process.

Climate Game is a game that, when played with strategy, negotiation and diplomacy, challenges its players to save the world from imminent destruction. With everyone's effort and awareness, the emission of carbonic gas can be reduced before it is too late.

This game is both of competition and cooperation. It promotes competition because the player who emits no carbonic gas at all is the winner. But the integrated work of all the other participants is essential in order not to exceed the gas limits of the greenhouse effect that the planet can put up with. If this limit is exceeded, the Earth's temperature will have risen to a level where human life is not possible and everyone dies/loses.

Therefore, participants must have a good degree of knowledge regarding gas emission and the greenhouse effect and also be very good at negotiating and formulating strategies.

This kind of game won't make you a specialist in ecology or in global warming, but can reinforce important concepts about the health of the planet. The game can teach basic ideas and stimulate the players to search for more information about the theme. This is the core of a good serious game.

CONCLUSION

Ludic interfaces and game mechanics could be used for serious causes. A game could be used for teaching. A game interface could be a meaningful space for significative experiences.

It seems that these ideas are essential to study and understand the gaming universe around the people and the impacts of the game culture in the mediatic scene and how important it can be for the contemporary world.

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